

ALSO ...

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— Andrea Stone

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► **DISASTER FALLOUT:** Earthquakes, floods and hurricanes cause suicide rates to climb among grieving and stressed survivors, researchers report in today's *New England Journal of Medicine*. A Centers for Disease Control and Prevention research team found a 13.8% increase in suicides during the four years after a natural disaster.

► **LAWSUIT SETTLED:** Retired Secret Service agent George Hickey Jr. has been paid an undisclosed lawsuit settlement by the publishers of a book that accused him of accidentally killing President John F. Kennedy after Lee Harvey Oswald opened fire on Nov. 22, 1963. Hickey denies the claim. St. Martin's Press, publisher of *Mortal Error: The Shot That Killed JFK*, said it settled to avoid litigation.

► **ASSISTED SUICIDE:** The body of Jeremy Allen, of Cambridge, Mass., was delivered to an Oakland County, Mich., hospital by Jack Kevorkian. Allen, 52, who suffered from cancer, died from a lethal injection of poison, the medical examiner's office said.

Secret

Conspiracy theory

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BECAUSE of his military credentials, Adm. Thomas Moorer, a former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, can't be dismissed as an uninformed crackpot when he says he believes TWA Flight 800 may have been shot down by a missile.

But we wonder if the questions he raises can ever be definitively answered.

Along with a retired Navy flyer, two TWA pilots and two witnesses who were on the ground, Adm. Moorer last week expressed doubts about the FBI's finding that the plane was destroyed by an accidental explosion, not foul play. They called on Congress to investigate.

Maybe such an investigation is in order. But it's worth recalling that Flight 800 had reached an altitude of over 13,000 feet when it exploded. It's hard to imagine that a shoulder-fired

antiaircraft missile launched by terrorists in a boat could have brought the plane down.

It's even harder to imagine the involvement of our own military. Yes, the Navy has surface-to-air missiles that easily could hit a high-flying civilian jetliner (one did so, in the Persian Gulf, in a tragic accident that killed 290 Iranians in 1988). But does anyone seriously believe that the military could successfully cover up such a disastrous mistake?

Well, as a matter of fact, there are probably quite a few people who believe it. Conspiracy theories seem to appeal to something in our psyches — whether they involve the assassination of JFK, the suicide of Vincent Foster or the death of Commerce Secretary Ron Brown in a plane crash.

But this is one we just can't buy. Adm. Moorer and his colleagues still have a big selling job to do.